

Cathedrals of Space, by Amber McMains

i.

I sketched a tree. It was mostly shading.
I sketched your face. It was mostly light.
I couldn't find a way to fill you in.
It seemed easier to leave undone.
The way you can know someone more
by assuming nothing, or forget to love
by enjoying your fingers too much. It's been easier
half-made, to see us together
as air, so reliable you can forget
how little holds anything up. Every photon
passing through our skin. Every day
dependent on tomorrow.

ii.

Like the Velveteen Rabbit,
not real until loved,
not aware of the sound of a familiar voice
at the periphery of sight,
always chewing on a niggling thought
so that it gets larger or smaller.

Meadow and sweetwater,
clover and marsh.
Nineteenth century locket
rusted by a gate
enclosing a yard overgrown with wildflowers,
mallow, cowslip, and foxglove.
And somewhere a knock-kneed boy
kneeling down
to where night meets day.
You tell me you love me
until the light of your face enshrouds the fabric of stars.

American Symphony, by Amber McMains

Because the morning is star-spangled,
I write this ode to you. You, who would weep at sunsets,
and write a page of poetry for scented candles.
You, who read magazines of Thanksgiving dinner recipes,
and can awe at a well-decorated cake.
America of the ice-cold lake, swum in by fully-clothed teenage boys.
Of girls who apply watermelon-scented nail polish.
I write for the family dog, dressed as a reindeer,
for the night when everyone lay on the grass, watching stars
and listening to cricket symphonies. America of the soufflé,
the gymnastics class, the soccer practice.
I write this poem for a perfect day
of rolling down the windows while driving to someone else's town.

Little Shop of Horrors, by Amber McMains

i.

All I need to do is think of a cherry print placemat,
And it all comes back to me,
Painting her nails red while she steered the car,
Sewing lace curtains and intricate doilies,
Lighting candles and crying after her most recent breakup.
She took me for milkshakes at the Corvette diner,
And laid out on the beach like a fifties pin-up.
She dyed her hair black with a single blond streak on the right side.
She was always in love or despair,
Putting icing roses on a cake,
But eating nothing. Sewing dresses out of old magazine patterns,
And watching me with an odd mixture of adulation and regret,
Each picture in her mind growing vivid
As she grew more sad, and when the phone rang
We held our breaths for a long moment as it clicked to machine.

ii.

Jazz, grapes, and Roquefort cheese,
everything I wished for her
when she wore her red dress and painted her nails to match.

I watched the clock leading up to her departure,
read *The Eleventh Hour* to a babysitter,
drank Crystal Light in a champagne glass.

Another boyfriend, another inevitable chance for hope
like the last dregs in a bottle, always sweet
and wanting. I spritz myself with her perfume when I go to the bathroom,

color my lips in red plum and strawberry splash.
I picture his car as a convertible, her high heels higher,
him dressed in a suit and a bolo tie.

Lady in Red repeats in my mind
as I lie tucked in the darkness of my room,
imagine laughter ringing from glass to glass,

a ballroom of dancing couples,
her car pulling safely into the drive...
still with nothing to show.

iii.

She had our gates built seven feet high,
dipped wallpaper border into water,
spent the afternoon
pressing lumps out of Care Bears and stars.

We hid flashlights under our pillows,
read stories after dark
or quizzed each other on state capitals,
my sister and I, unaware of the shadows
that arced under the door

as she watched TV
and drank another glass of wine,
her future falling into dark spaces,
dreaming of the luminosity of a man's arms
to lift us into bed,
record the message on our answering machine.

It could keep us awake
a little bit longer,
the sound of her voice
talking quietly on the phone.